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ABSTRACT

Although critics frequently attack the concept, multicultural education is neither a new nor a single idea. Cultural factors have become increasingly important for teachers and students alike. In that sense, teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers must become more multicultural. It is helpful to define multicultural education as education that is responsive to cultural differences, with the aim to: (1) promote individual student achievement; and (2) promote mutual respect and tolerance among students. Analysts differ over whether teachers should be judgmental concerning the culturally based student behavior they observe. The need to avoid ethnocentrism, however, does not necessarily mean teachers must be entirely nonjudgmental. It is possible to evaluate another's behavior by first interpreting that behavior properly. Multicultural education may have the aim of training students for future citizenship in a diverse society. Broader goals may include a reduction in prejudice and discrimination, the provision of social justice and equal opportunity, and an equal distribution of power among all groups. Such education becomes increasingly controversial as it expands beyond the basic goals of good citizenship. The underlying aim of multicultural education should be giving students a more or less realistic view of the world and helping them think for themselves. To succeed, the effort must bring to its construction a true diversity of voices. (Contains 32 references and 12 endnotes). (SG)

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PERSPECTIVE

Council for Basic Education

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MULTICULTURALISM: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

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by Robert K. Fullinwider

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he idea that a diversity of views has educational value belongs not just to multiculturalism, but to a long tradition of political and philosophical thought. . . Thus, the school should welcome the kind of diversity that lets students grow and learn from one another.

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INTRODUCTION

The aims of multiculturalism in education have fueled a wide-ranging debate that speaks to our civic life as much as it does to the conduct of schools. It is an essential debate, for it concerns balancing the need to impart the principles and traditions of American democracy, with cultivating an appreciation for our remarkable diversity. To date, however, much of the conversation—and the controversy—has focused on the political questions. Though important, it has done little to serve teachers in their classrooms as they daily encounter increasing diversity both in the content of what they teach and among the students they are educating.

In this Perspective, Robert K. Fullinwider examines the various definitions of multiculturalism and the nature of "culture" itself. He concludes with appropriate and workable objectives for multicultural education which foster mutual understanding and respect for difference in the school.

Robert K. Fullinwider is a senior research scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, University of Maryland at College Park. We are grateful to the Walter and Elise Haas Foundation for their support of this Perspective.

A. Graham Down
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Council for Basic Foundation

MULTICULTURALISM: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

by Robert K. Fullinwider

When the New York State Social Studies Review and Development Committee presented its report, "One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence," to the Commissioner of Education in the spring of 1991, the story played on the front pages of The New York Times for a week. The Commissioner had asked the Committee to "review existing State social studies syllabi and to make recommendations. . . designed to increase students' understanding of American culture and its history; the cultures, identities, and histories of the diverse groups which comprise American society today; and the cultures, identities, and histories of other peoples throughout the world." In response, the Committee recommended that the New York social studies curriculum should (i) avoid "language which is insensitive or may be interpreted as racist or sexist"; (ii) "provide more opportunities for students to learn from multiple perspectives"; (iii) "better reflect the variety of cultural and social divisions extant in the nation's peoples"; and (iv) "be sensitive to the changing nature of our knowledge and criteria by which educated persons are judged" (New York, 1991, Executive Summary).

Among the critics of the report was Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whose various animadversions found their way into a little book, *The Disuniting of America*, published later in 1991. Schlesinger saw the New York report as an instance of the growing "cult of ethnicity" in education. "Of course history should be taught from a variety of perspectives," he allowed. And students "need to learn much more about other races, other cultures, other continents." But the "cult of ethnicity" goes too far.

> The new ethnic gospel rejects the unifying vision of individuals from all nations melted into a new race. Its underlying philosophy is that America is not a nation of individuals at all but a nation of groups, that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans.

The "militants of ethnicity," according to Schlesinger, want the schools to protect, strengthen, celebrate, and perpetuate ethnic identity. He worries that if each ethnic and racial community is "taught to cherish its own apartness from the rest," the American melting pot may "give way to the Tower of Babel" (Schlesinger, 1992).

Schlesinger expressed the alarms of many people about multicultural education, who see it as bad education and threatening to national cohesion. If their alarms are not altogether justified, they are not altogether baseless: "One Nation, Many Peoples" had

been preceded two years before by another report to the Commissioner, "A Curriculum of Inclusion," full of third-rate scholarship and ethnic rancor (Task Force, 1989).

Multicultural education — the idea and the movement — is not new. It derives from several sources. Among the most prominent are the civil rights' and the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s. As part of their demands for full participation in the political, economic, and cultural institutions of America, blacks and women began challenging textbooks and curricula they saw perpetuating unacceptable stereotypes. They took to task educational materials that rendered them virtually invisible as historical actors and as real people with distinct interests and perception. In addition, activists protested against "cultural bias" in achievement tests, the excessive segregation of black students into classes for disabled or slow learners, and the denigration of "Black English" in the curriculum.

Other groups, as well, began to adopt a more assertive, self-conscious political identity. Hispanics and Asians — whose populations grew substantially in the 1970s — pressed for bilingual education and fairer school financing. European ethnic groups became more sensitive to processes of assimilation that eroded distinctive cultural traits tying them to their societies of origin. A spur to education reform that took account of these developments was the Ethnic Heritages Act of 1972, which lent federal support to educational efforts to stimulate greater awareness of cultural variety in America.[1]

People attack and defend multicultural education as if it were a single, unitary idea or practice. It isn't.

Finally, to trace out a final source, the insistence by various groups that educational materials better represent their history and culture rekindled educational ideas from an earlier movement, in the 1940s, to foster "intercultural" understanding (Olneck, 1990).

By the mid-1970s a theoretical literature on "multicultural education" had begun growing up not only in the United States but in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom as well. Australia and the United Kingdom faced new educational challenges posed by substantial immigration in the 1960s and 1970s — from southern and eastern Europe and Southeast Asia in the former and from East Asia and the West Indies in the latter. Canada faced political and educational challenges from newly assertive French Quebec.[2] The emerging theoretical literatures shared similar themes and reflected a considerable cross-fertilization.[3]

The theoretical literature in part drew inspiration from the efforts of several institutions and governments to encourage practical implementation. The American Association

of Colleges for Teacher Education developed a position on multicultural education in its 1969 publication, *Teachers for a Real World* (Smith, 1969) and its 1972 report, "No One Model American" (Lopez, 1979). In 1976, the National Council for Social Studies published Curriculum Guidelines for Multiethnic Education (National Council, 1976; revised, 1992) and in 1977 the Teachers Corps and the Association of Teacher Educators published a set of materials for multicultural education (Gold et al, 1977). In 1979, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education established a requirement that all teacher training institutions include some instruction in multicultural education (Gollnick & Chinn, 1980).

By 1984, twenty-six states had begun programs in multicultural education (Crumpton, 1992). Most notably, California's History-Social Science curriculum framework, established in 1987, mandated a multicultural dimension to a significantly expanded course of historical studies for grades 4-12 (California, 1987).

Though multicultural education is not, by any means, a new idea, execution lags behind concept (Rashid, 1990). Teaching English to students who speak a different language constitutes the bulk of "multicultural" activities in most states. Moreover, most teacher education programs have provided little more than superficial training in multicultural education (Crumpton, 1992; Gollnick, 1992; Bennett). The arena of most change in the 1980s has been the implementation of "Afrocentric" curricula in many school districts dominated by black school boards or city officials.[4]

The last few years, however, have seen a surge in the creation of self-consciously "multicultural" texts and readers. Increased efforts to adopt these texts along with increased activities by states (such as New York and California) to give real bite to multicultural mandates have come just as the national media have focused on the "culture wars" and the "battle of the books" on college and university campuses. This confluence of events explains why public controversy about multicultural education is a very recent phenomenon.

What Is Multicultural Education?

People attack and defend multicultural education as if it were a single, unitary idea or practice. It isn't. Many different — and often incompatible — ideas and aims get lumped together under the common label. In order to sort out the different directions multiculturalists can go, we need to identify the base upon which all forms of multicultural education stand. That base consists of two simple propositions.

The first proposition says that responsible education must identify and respond to factors that affect the achievement and well-being of students in school. This proposition seems beyond quarrel, at least as applied to obvious cases. For example, if a student because she hears poorly cannot comprehend her teacher, the teacher should speak more loudly and distinctly. If a student because of his size is picked on or bullied by other boys, the teacher should intervene to stop it.

Many kinds of factors affect a student's achievement and well-being, from the

distractions of an empty stomach to the deficiencies of prior preparation. In the one case a free breakfast program and in the other a special remedial class can improve the student's achievement and well-being; and for the range of factors in between, good schools respond in appropriate ways.

Within that range may fall factors we would call "cultural" — factors such as language, religious observances, distinctive modes of dress, customary forms of honor, and the like. A student may skip school because she's uncomfortable undressing in front of other students for P.E. class (Hindu forms of modesty forbid it) or fail to do well because she speaks English imperfectly (her native language is Creole) or become alienated and withdrawn because other students ridicule her daily practice of prayer (required by the tenets of her Islamic faith). A good school should take notice and intervene in each of these cases: intervene to provide a private place for the student to undress, to help the student acquire English literacy, and to insist on respect for the student's religious observances.

A base definition: Multicultural education aims to promote individual student achievement, and mutual respect and tolerance among students.

The second simple proposition of multicultural education, then, is this: "cultural" factors have become increasingly salient for teachers and students. From the two simple propositions a third follows: teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers must increasingly give special attention to cultural factors. They must be "multicultural."

Of the two simple propositions, no one would deny the first and few would deny the second. The ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity in the student bodies of urban schools today far exceeds that of thirty years ago.[5] Against the fact of such diversity, if students are to achieve to their potential and learn in a setting of mutual respect, schools must work harder to foster acceptance and tolerance. They must present students with a curriculum adapted to their interests and preparation. Where "culture" is the problem, attending to "culture" is the solution.

From such considerations we can extract a ***base definition*** of multicultural education: in a culturally mixed setting, multicultural education is education responsive to cultural differences, with the aim of (i) promoting individual student achievement and (ii) promoting mutual respect and tolerance among students.[6]

Multicultural education so defined is surely a necessary part of schooling. Where teachers and students come from quite separate backgrounds, teacher ignorance and

insensitivity can make the classroom a hostile environment for many students. Where students differ considerably among themselves, the natural cruelty and clannishness of children and adolescents can turn school into a system of mutually incomprehending, suspicious, and contemptuous cliques and gangs.

Teacher insensitivity and student cliquishness have always characterized schools. Their effects tend to be offset by homogeneity — offset by students, teachers, and community sharing much in common. The differences that divide students from one another and from their teachers remain minimal and the divisions founded on them are dampened out by commonalities. Where homogeneity is replaced by heterogeneity, however, the divisions founded on difference can overwhelm the school and poison its mission. The average American teacher is not much more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than her students, who bring from home a variety of prejudices, misconceptions, fears, and anxieties added to their general ignorance about the world. In a school system — and in a world — where heterogeneous people must interact, multicultural education means two things. It means training teachers to understand and be comfortable with differences they have not encountered before, and it means teaching students how to transcend differences that might otherwise throw them into discord.

These propositions about multicultural education are unlikely to elicit much debate. Where, then, from the base definition of multicultural education can controversy emanate? Disagreement can flow from several sources: from differing conceptions of "culture," differing views about how to be "responsive to cultural differences," and differing interpretations of the base aim. Let's explore each source in turn.

"Culture"

In the multicultural literature, the idea of "cultural differences" generally gets treated expansively. For example, the widely used text by Gollnick and Chinn (1986) covers ethnicity, religion, language, sex and gender, socioeconomic status, exceptionality, and age. Why assimilate differences associated with these categories all under a single rubric, "culture?" The only common thread seems to be this: differences of ethnicity, gender, class, age, race, exceptionality, religion, and language have all been associated with exclusion, discrimination, and intolerance. The implicit equation of "cultural difference" with "basis of discrimination" builds into multicultural education a certain bias, making it more preoccupied with prejudice and oppression than the bare concept of "culture" might warrant.

Indeed, when multiculturalists define "culture" itself the definitions don't quite map easily onto all the categories of difference listed above. According to another widely used text (Bennett, 1990), "culture" is "a system of shared knowledge and belief that shapes human perception and generates social behavior." It is a "world view." Similarly, James Banks (1992), a leading theorist of multiculturalism, describes culture as the "knowledge, concepts, and values shared by a group through systems of communica-

tion." In the sense of "world view" or "shared interpretive perspective," a group's "culture" will comprise the habits of thought and feeling distinctive to it.

Although Gollnick and Chinn (1986) speak, for example, of "exceptional individuals" (i.e., gifted and handicapped children) as parts of "microcultures" made up of those with similar exceptionalities, what such students usually share are common challenges to being included in mainstream school activities, rather than common concepts and values shared through inter-communication. The fact that disabled, impaired, and retarded children get discriminated against or excluded from the ordinary classroom, and the fact that teachers must acquire sensitivity to the special needs of such children — these, and not the presence or absence of a distinctive world view (i. e. a distinctive "culture"), ground Gollnick's and Chinn's special interest in exceptional children.

The formal definitions of culture offered in the literature share the feature of being "nonevaluative." That is, by describing something as, for example, "a system of shared beliefs that shapes perception and behavior," we say nothing about its value or worth. In this nonevaluative way, people speak of the culture of the corporation, the culture of the Catholic Church, the culture of poverty, the culture of sports, the culture of the Mafia, the culture of Norway, and the culture of the military; of academic culture, police culture, youth culture, gay culture, and sports culture. These phrases draw our

The implicit equation of 'cultural difference' with 'basis of discrimination' builds into multicultural education a certain bias.

attention to the codes of loyalty and silence that bind members of the Mafia to one another; the values of military life expressed in its distinctive rituals, regimentation, and routines; the language, religion, and domestic customs of Norway; and the present-time preferences common to people long mired in poverty.

The concept of "culture," then, may not help us very much in understanding multicultural education, which must make distinctions of value and worth, not ignore them. The concept may in fact be a hindrance. Although multicultural education is supposed to make us sensitive to differences, phrases like "the culture of" or "their culture" easily snare us into imputing to groups distinct boundaries or self-contained identities, to imposing on them, in short, a false homogeneity. Real individuals live in a multitude of cross-cutting, overlapping "cultural worlds." Consider this description of a person: Lutheran, physicist, labor unionist, Anglophone, mother, political conservative; of Italian ancestry, reared in the American South, resident in New England, gourmet

cook of Chinese food.? Where do we locate this person culturally? What neat container awaits her classification? She has integrated into her life a profusion of cultural materials drawn from many sources and we cannot know, offhand, which aspect she takes as most central to her identity and how she balances the tensions built into her different roles. Does she see the world primarily through the discipline of her scientific training, the habits of her maternal care, or the doctrines of her religious faith? Have we done her justice to classify her an Italian-American?

The dangers of unsubtle homogenizing and ham-handed description are quite evident in much of the multicultural literature. Theorists there commonly distinguish between an American "macroculture" containing within it various "microcultures" (Bennett, 1990; Gollnick and Chinn, 1986; Banks, 1992). Their characterization of the "macroculture" tends toward the same banalities. American society prizes "individual success" more than "commitment to family, community, and nation-state" (Banks, 1992). It stresses "independence and self-sufficiency ... over teamwork" (Bennett, 1990). "The overpowering value of the dominant group [in America] is ... the belief that every individual is his or her own master, is in control of his or her own destiny, and will advance or regress in society only according to his or her own efforts" (Gollnick and Chinn, 1986). In contrast to the "individualism" of the American macroculture, such microcultures as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, it is said, are "group-oriented" (Banks, 1992; Sleeter, 1992; Bennett, 1990).

Any account of an "American outlook" obviously must tell some story about "individualism," but the crude sociological generalizations that frequent the multicultural literature hardly suffice. What, for example, are we to make of the claim that a people whose history has been dominated by such institutions as the grange, the agricultural cooperative, the labor union, the joint-stock corporation, the credit union, the militia, the church congregation, the quilting bee, the mutual aid society, the volunteer fire brigade, the professional association, the fraternal lodge, and the common school believes that individuals can advance "only" by their own efforts? What are we to make of the idea that a society where almost everybody participates in team sports, music ensembles, church choirs, bridge clubs, car pools, political campaigns, amateur theatrical groups, and charitable organizations prizes "independence" over "teamwork?"

The America whose "macroculture" is at issue at least has well-defined boundaries, although they are purely juridical. (What culturally distinguishes Oregonians from British Columbians?) Ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, economic, age, and exceptionality "groups" in the United States lack either legal or physical boundaries to mark off their "members," about whom appropriate "microcultural" generalizations might be made. Attempting to describe a "Black world view" (Bennett) or an "Hispanic outlook" or a "culture of exceptionality" may require a packaging more creative than accurate. Despite lip service to intra-group heterogeneity, multicultural writers do not always successfully resist trading in dubious generalizing.

Why, then, not give up the term "culture?" If it serves no crucial analytical role, why not drop it and simply describe multicultural education as education responsive to

individual differences in students? The reason multiculturalists retain talk about culture becomes plainer when we turn, now, to their ideas about what "being responsive to difference" entails.

Being "Responsive to Cultural Differences"

Describing thought or action as "cultural" *dignifies* it. "Cultural differences" should "be treated as *differences* rather than deficiencies" (Gollnick, 1986, p. 28). Here, then, we see the motivation for speaking of "culture." Calling something "cultural" implies a particular policy. Recall the example earlier of the good school accommodating the culturally based reluctance of a student to undress with other students for P. E. class. The school provided a private place for the student to change clothes. Generalizing from this example suggests a rule: in regard to behavior or belief that is "cultural," the school should adjust to the child, not the child to the school.

The motif, "different, not deficient," became prominent in the 1960's debates about the education of poor black children and the legitimacy of "Black English." According to the 1969 policy statement of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, teachers should be trained to see in their "disadvantaged" students strengths, not weaknesses. They should "respect the various languages [of their students] as equal ... rather than impose upon all arbitrarily a 'standard code.' " They should appreciate that their students from different social and economic backgrounds have different "life styles." They should see a "child's cultural heritage" as "the basis for his education, not a stumbling block" (Smith, 1969). More broadly, with regard to language, religion, national origins, and other such differences, teachers must operate on "the principle that to be different is not to be inferior" (Gold et al, 1977).

Bennett (1990) provides a clear version of this motif, contrasting the "deficit" with the "difference" model for explaining failure in school. The "deficit" model points to features of the student's home environment that make a child less ready for school. The "difference model," on the other hand, "accuses the school, rather than the child of unreadiness. Its proponents claim that the deficit view is based on ethnocentric research; that is, research based on Anglo-middle class norms and values."

One way teachers manifest "unreadiness" is through cultural ignorance that leads them to misinterpret student behavior. For example, among inner-city black students, according to Bennett, "the preference for cooperation in work may develop" because so much of their experience takes place in peer groups. Teachers need to understand this, since "[w]hat is nearly always interpreted by teachers as cheating, copying, or frivolous socializing may in fact be the child's natural [i. e., "cultural"] inclination to seek help from a peer (borrowing a pencil or talking after a test has begun)." Black students can also be misinterpreted in other ways. According to one teacher, African American students are more expressive than others. "[T]he way that they express themselves other people think that they're out of control, rude and disrespectful .... [M]any other children look to see what you want, and then they do it, where a black

child ... [will] look to see what you want and if they agree with it they'll do it but if they don't they waste no bones in telling you that they don't agree. [Teachers] have to know that.... [The children are] not being rude — that's the way they are" (quoted in Ladson-Billings, 1992).

"That's part of their culture" is supposed to mean: accept it; accommodate to it; don't judge it inferior. However, where does this commendatory function of "culture" come from? It has no foundation in the definitions of culture offered by the multicultural theorists. Recall that those definitions were evaluatively neutral. To call something "cultural" — that is, to call it an aspect of a system of shared beliefs that shape behavior and perception — implies nothing about what evaluative attitude we should take toward it. We need not approve of everything "cultural." We need not value the code of silence enforced by the "culture of the Mafia," endorse the tendency to narcissism induced in athletes by the "culture of sports," or respect the official homophobia of "military culture." Thus, the commendatory use of the word "culture" must draw on some further assumptions.

Real individuals live in a multitude of cross-cutting, overlapping 'cultural worlds.'

In fact, multicultural education theorists embrace several not always compatible strands of thought about "culture" and its valuation. One strand of thought implies that teachers actually should be ***nonjudgmental*** about cultural differences and should encourage this attitude in students (Payne, 1980; Bennett, 1990; Bullivant, 1992). We can reconstruct within this strand at least three different arguments for a nonjudgmental policy. The first argument claims the barrier to criticizing cultural differences is ***epistemological***: because cultures are equal in value (Bennett, 1990; Gollnick and Chinn, 1986), there is no basis of appropriate discrimination among cultural differences. The second argument erects a barrier for a ***practical*** reason: aspects of culture can be bad as well as good but encouraging students (and teachers) to criticize cultural practices leads too easily to prejudiced judgments (Payne, 1992). Nonjudgmentalism is the best policy. Finally, the third argument sees the barrier to judgment as ***moral***: whether or not there is a basis for discriminating between good and bad cultural practices, other cultures have the right not to be criticized (Bullivant, 1992).

A second strand of thought implies that teachers and students ***should*** take up a judgmental attitude about cultural differences, a uniformly positive attitude. The multicultural classroom should accept and affirm cultural differences (Grant and Sleeter,

1992); it should portray diversity positively (Gollnick and Chinn, 1986). (It is in the context of this strand that the commendatory function of the word "culture" finds a home.) The second strand tends to remain silent, however, on the crucial question of *why* we should value all differences positively.

How, in fact, should we think about the possibility and appropriateness of judging cultural differences? Both teachers and theorists find this a particularly nettlesome question. Let's leave aside for the moment practical and moral considerations bearing on judgment and focus on the epistemological. Gollnick & Chinn (1986) raise the spectre of "ethnocentric" judgment, a sin multicultural educators typically warn against.

We need not approve of everything 'cultural,' for example, the official homophobia of 'military culture.'

Ethnocentric judgment betrays our "inability to view other cultures as equally viable for organizing reality." Instead of judging other cultures by the terms of our own, we should judge them on their terms — so goes the argument. But what does "on their terms, not ours" mean?

It means avoiding automatically taking our "ways" as normative, but this point requires some explaining. "Our ways" refers to the complex of customs and conventions that shape our daily lives, a complex that includes law, etiquette, economic practices, religious observances, and the like. To take a commonplace example of how these forms guide our behavior, we know that at a dinner belching would be impolite and saying "thank you" would show our appreciation (Gollnick and Chinn, 1986). Suppose we visit another society where people openly and frequently belch at meals. We shouldn't thoughtlessly conclude the people there are crude and ungracious; we have to know what's going on when they belch. It may be *their* conventional way of showing appreciation.

We have to interpret their behavior and to do so, we have to have some insight into our own behavior. We have to learn to distinguish between *form* and *value* so that we can understand that different forms can serve the same value. For example, we have a law that everyone drive on the right. Its point is to assure safe and efficient driving by having everybody follow the same rule. In England, the rule says drive on the left. The rule is different but the point is exactly the same. Likewise, our table conventions guide us in showing respect and gratitude to our host. Just as there is no naturally best side of the road to drive on, not belching at a meal is no more a naturally best symbol of respect and gratitude than belching. What matters is that everyone in a community follows the same form, whatever it is.

If we understand, then, how our form expresses certain underlying values of respect and gratitude, we are in a position to interpret and judge the custom of other people not by reference to our *form* but by reference to the *underlying values* their custom serves. We can see that other people are as concerned to express respect and gratitude as we are; they just do it differently. Judging them "on their terms, not our terms," then, means not making our *form* a standard. But we do refer back to our underlying values; only by imputing to them the same values we have do we see their behavior as a form of politeness and respect.

Thus, ethnocentrism does *not* mean judging other people by our *values*. On the contrary, to avoid ethnocentrism we must employ a principle of interpretive charity that assumes others try to pursue and realize the same basic values we do.[8]

The need to avoid ethnocentric judgments does not imply a strict nonjudgmentalism. If we can correctly interpret the behavior of another people, we can subject it to evaluation as well. If, for example, we discover that the ubiquitous belching in a strange society is actually meant to give offense, not show respect, we will have to conclude we are among a rude people after all.

The real problem is getting our interpretations right. Different barriers to interpretation exist at different levels of cultural complexity and distance. Judging whole "cultures" (i. e., whole societies, whole civilizations) lies on the upper extreme of the scale of difficulty, judging specific "cultural practices" falls toward the lower. While the amount of information needed fairly and accurately to judge whole societies almost certainly exceeds our grasp (how many of us understand deeply and thoroughly our own!), we may be in a position to understand particular customs or conduct. Even here we should be very cautious; the full meaning of a specific practice will depend in some measure on its connections to other practices, institutions, and customs, about which we may know less than we think. Humility in judgment always requires that we err on the side of caution.

Attempting to describe a 'black world view' or an 'Hispanic outlook' may require a packaging more creative than accurate.

How would these considerations bear on the examples of "cultural interpretation" discussed above by Bennett and the unnamed school teacher? It is certainly possible for white teachers to misinterpret the behavior of their African American students. White teachers are often uninformed (and even misinformed) about life among African

Americans. If a special form of "cooperation in work" exists among black youth, a teacher needs to ask whether "cooperativeness" gives the best interpretation of the conduct she observes. Conduct like borrowing pencils and talking once a test is underway may indeed exhibit a pattern suggesting a connection to some important value or other. But, then, it may not either. That African American students rely heavily on peer groups doesn't by itself impose one interpretation rather than another on the conduct. Moreover, black as well as white teachers reasonably require a certain orderliness in test-taking. While they ought to be flexible and even inventive in devising modes of order suitable to their students, they may also require students to adjust themselves to the needs of order. Such requirements when necessary hardly impose "Anglo norms"; similar requirements are as likely to be found in the schools of Japan, Venezuela, Malawi, and Indonesia as in ours.

Labeling the behavior of students as "cultural" *starts* interpretive inquiry by the teacher, not forecloses it the way the commendatory use of "culture" does. Saying "it's cultural" doesn't really answer the question of the appropriateness or value of behavior.

Even if a particular judgment about some "cultural difference" is warranted, there may be yet practical and moral reasons for not pronouncing the judgment or acting on it. Still, neither epistemological, practical, or moral considerations require the indiscriminate "affirming" of cultural differences. "Let us affirm and celebrate our differences" as a motto of multicultural education, thus, must be taken with a grain of salt. It means something like this. The different languages, religious beliefs, national origins, and intellectual traditions students bring to the school are potential sources of cross-fertilization and mutual learning. Encountering a diversity of views and perceptions lets students stretch their imaginations and expand their horizons. It makes them more cosmopolitan and less parochial, more thoughtful and less close-minded.

The view that a diversity of views has educational value belongs not just to multiculturalism but to a long tradition of political and philosophical thought. It received one of its canonical formulations by John Stuart Mill. In *On Liberty* he declared that we cannot become wise about any subject except through "hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and ... every character of mind" (Burtt, 1939). Thus, the school should welcome the kind of diversity that lets students grow and learn from one another.

Finally, the school's public "affirming of differences" affirms not only intellectual opportunity but the solidarity of the school community. It affirms all the students as equal, and equally respected, schoolmates.

However, not every student will or should like all the differences he encounters among other students. The "affirming" stance of the school ought not imply to the student the impossibility or undesirability of honest disagreement but rather ought to suggest that he stretch himself to find something he can like in other students and that he tolerate what he can't like. The school should offer a forum where students can hash out their differences in fruitful ways.

Sometimes differences can be talked about and talked through. But sometimes not.

For the sake of school peace and student harmony, it may be better to let some "cultural" differences assume a low profile. Within its broader "affirming" posture, the school needs to display some subtlety about the specific programmatic implementation of its overall multicultural aim of generating mutual respect and tolerance among the students.

Room for subtlety gets drastically diminished on some conceptions of multicultural education. The National Council for the Social Studies' recently revised guidelines (adopted in 1991), in particular, never resolve an acute tension between means and ends because they remain fixated on a particular means. The guidelines note that although many Americans "derive primary identity from ethnic group membership," others do not. "For many persons ... ethnic criteria may be irrelevant for purposes of

How should we think about judging cultural differences? Both teachers and theorists find this a nettlesome question.

self-identification" (NCSS, 1992).[9] Indeed, one of the four basic principles of the guidelines asserts that "[e]thnic and cultural identification should be optional for individuals." People "should be free to choose their group allegiances."

On the other hand, the guidelines want schooling to reflect through and through both the idea and the reality of ethnicity. Ethnicity should be both the central organizing concept and dominant curriculum theme of multicultural education because

> [p]ersonal ethnic identity and knowledge of others' ethnic identities is *essential* to the sense of understanding and the feeling of personal well-being that promote intergroup and international understanding. Multicultural education should stress the process of self-identification as an essential aspect of the understanding that underlies commitment to the dignity of humankind throughout the world.... Students cannot fully understand why they are the way they are ... until they have a solid knowledge of the groups to which they belong.... (NCSS, 1992; emphasis added.)

How can multicultural education continually stress ethnic self-identification while simultaneously honoring the fact that ethnic self-identification both is and should remain insignificant in the lives of many students? How can students effectively retain the "right to select the manner and degree of identifying or not identifying" with ethnic groups if their curriculum consistently pushes them to "know" their own ethnic identity? Despite the fact that the guidelines propose that "[l]ooking at group membership should not undermine a student's individuality ... [and that] students should be aware of the

many groups to which they belong" rather than being "assigned and locked into one," the question remains unanswered: how can ethnic identification remain negligible for a student if he must assign himself one in school?

The same concern arises from the New York State Committee report (1991). The report proposes that to promote "empathetic sensibility and personal awareness, the curriculum should ***continually*** encourage students to ask themselves ... Who am I?" (New York, 1991; emphasis added.) If that question about identity must be answered in terms of ethnicity (even if in other terms as well), then a multicultural curriculum becomes a vehicle of "compulsory ethnicity." Furthermore, if we accept the premise that students "do not become open to different ethnic groups until and unless they develop a positive sense of self, including an ***awareness and acceptance of their own ethnic group***" (Bennett, 1990; emphasis added) and that personal ethnic identification "is essential to the sense of understanding" that promotes intergroup comity, then multicultural education cannot achieve its aims ***without*** compulsory ethnicity. Perhaps Schlesinger had some basis for thinking that multiculturalism encourages a "cult of ethnicity."[10]

How can ethnic identification remain negligible for a student if he must assign himself one in school?

Aims

If controversies arise from the ways some multiculturalist theorists think the school ought to be "responsive to cultural difference,"[11] yet other controversies center around the way theorists interpret or augment the base aim of multicultural education. Our ***base definition***, recall, spoke of multicultural education aiming to promote individual achievement as well as mutual respect and tolerance among students. This double aim can be understood in more or less expansive ways.

Minimally, multicultural education aims to help students achieve at the tasks imposed by schools as currently constituted; and it aims to foster respect and concord among students as common and equal members of the school. Limited to this minimum, multicultural education would not aim to change or alter the nature of the school or the academic tasks it requires. It would not aim directly at adult achievements outside school, although such achievements might happen as a desirable byproduct of getting students to achieve in school. And it would not aim directly at creating mutual respect

and concord within the larger community, although such an outcome might happen as a desirable byproduct of getting students to respect one another in school.

One natural way to generate a more ambitious multiculturalism is to add a social focus to its goals. Schooling, we may think, should aim directly at certain social outcomes or certain adult behavior. For example, schools have traditionally shouldered both vocational and civic missions, training students to occupy specific jobs or crafts and to deliberate responsibly as citizens. Multicultural education could certainly be enlisted in the school's civic mission. As the nation becomes more ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse, and as new groups assert themselves, the capacity of citizens to deliberate about the differences among us takes on greater urgency and faces greater barriers.

One medium by which some version of multicultural education likely will get incorporated into the school's civic mission is *CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education*, the massive project of the Center for Civic Education and the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship to spell out the components of an ideal "civic literacy." *CIVITAS* includes a discussion of multiculturalism and a more extensive treatment of ethnic and cultural pluralism than a similar effort might have yielded a decade or two ago. As the foundation for the CCE's follow-on project, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, to develop national standards in civics and government, *CIVITAS* will certainly influence the civics training of the twenty-first century, a training that must, in its words, "help all students become intelligent and informed citizens" (Bahmueller, 1991).

Beyond the task of training students for future citizenship, however, multicultural education might imagine broader goals yet. Grant and Sleeter (1992) offer this list of "societal goals" for multicultural education: "to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to provide equal opportunity and social justice to all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of different cultural groups." The means to these goals would include "instructional programs ... to produce an awareness, acceptance, and affirmation of cultural diversity." Even more ambitiously, multicultural education could aim to be "social reconstructionist," seeking "to reform society toward greater equity" through, among other means, training "social action skills" in students and getting them to "coalesce" to "fight against oppression" (Grant and Sleeter, 1992).

Clearly, the more ambitiously multicultural education expands beyond a modest interpretation of the base aim, the more controversial it becomes. If, as Lynch (1989) posits, the aims of multicultural education include "the creative development of cultural diversity, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the achievement of human justice" not just in the school but in the community and the nation, then multicultural education reaches for the sky, and in the process quite likely renders itself incoherent as a guide to educational change. To define multicultural education in relation of such grand goals loses sight of the limits inherent in schooling.

Indeed, Lynch, one of its leading theorists, admits that multicultural education has tended to overreach. "[M]ulticultural educationists have strayed far beyond the primary goals of education, inflating their quest into educational imperialism and failing to recognize that the multicultural aspect is only one dimension of the overall goals of a school and that change can only be mediated by re-attaching multicultural education to those goals" (Lynch, 1989). Cultural diversity, social cohesion, and human justice

Multicultural education could certainly be enlisted in the school's civic mission.

are good things and ought to be in the back of our minds when we think about education, but they ought not be in the front of our minds.

What ought to be in the front of our minds is the more limited but special competence of schools. Educating students means, in general, giving them a more or less realistic picture of the world and helping them think for themselves. Educating students specifically for citizenship means rehearsing them in civic roles and language. We may believe, or hope anyway, that a society of educated persons will be culturally richer, more cohesive, and more just. But the school's business is to educate its students well and let the more remote aims take care of themselves.[12]

Here, then, is how I would sum up a somewhat chastened general conception of multicultural education. Such education should reflect to students some of the diversity and variability of their world. It should aim directly at creating a school climate of mutual respect and tolerance in which the learning and development of all students can flourish. Finally, it should inform whatever civic training the schools undertake. Such aims, though more modest-seeming than some others, provide ample room for ambitious rethinking of curriculum and pedagogy, and leave ample room for disagreement and difference. But they also contain the disagreement within manageable boundaries, leaving us to hope we might make progress toward real educational change with less controversy.

The theorizing of multicultural education has so far largely proceeded along a few well-trodden paths. The theorists all say much the same thing. For multicultural education to succeed, we must bring to its construction what multicultural theorists prize above all but do not display much of among themselves, a true diversity of voices.

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ENDNOTES

1. Public Law 92-318 (June 23, 1972); 20 USC 821. The purpose of the act was "to provide assistance designed to afford students opportunity to learn about the nature of their own cultural heritage, and to study the contributions of the cultural heritages of other ethnic groups of the Nation."

2. In 1985, the report of the Committee on Inquiry Into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, Education for All (London: HMSO, 1986) put England officially behind multicultural education. However, the Educational Reform Act of 1988, establishing a national curriculum, severely circumscribed the prospects for multiculturalism in British schools. In 1989, Australia adopted a "National Agenda for Multicultural Australia," which affects education as well as other policy areas. Two decades ago, Canada granted Quebec extensive legal autonomy and established both French and English as national languages of official business. The country is still struggling for a constitutional resolution to the special status of Quebec after the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990 and the Charlottetown Accord in 1992.

3. James Banks (United States), James Lynch (England), and Brian Bullivant (Australia) have been among the most influential writers.

4. For example, most of Atlanta's schools and teachers use an Afrocentric curriculum, according to a report in The Washington Post, November 27, 1992, p. 1. See also *African-American Baseline Essays*, Portland (Oregon) Schools (1987). An Afrocentric curriculum is organized from a "African-centered perspective" and emphasizes that Africa was the birthplace of civilization.

5. As the students grow more diverse, the teachers do not. Ninety percent of those currently enrolled in teacher preparation programs are white (see Gollnick, 1992, p. 238).

6. That this definition captures the "base" is, I believe, evident from the standard characterizations in the literature. See Banks and Banks, (1992, p. 1) (A goal of multicultural education is "to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in schools."); Banks (1992, pp. 2, 20) ("A major goal of multicultural education is to improve academic achievement.... Another major goal ... is to help all students develop more positive attitudes toward different cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups."); Bennett, (1990, p. 5) ("A primary purpose of this book is to show how multicultural education can help teachers better achieve their major goal: the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students' highest potentials."); Gollnick and Chinn (1986, p. vii) ("An overall goal of multicultural education is to help all students develop their potential for academic, social, and vocational success."); James (1980, p. 19) ("When planning for multicultural education it is most important to remember that the primary objective is to improve educational opportunities for individuals."); AACTE, "No One Model American" (1972) ("... multicultural education affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through programs rooted in the preservation and extension of cultural alternatives," quoted in Gollnick, 1992, p. 224); NCATE (1979) ("Multicultural education is preparation for the social, political, and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters," quoted in Gollnick, 1992, p. 226).

7. Multicultural theorists note that everyone belongs to many groups; see Banks (1992), pp. 13, 14; Sleeter (1991a), p. 18; Grant and Sleeter (1992), p. 45.

8. See Payne, 1980, p. 83 (the lesson for students to learn is that all people have the same basic needs, they just meet them in different ways).

9. See also Condianni and Tipple, 1980, p. 28.

10. A similar concern has been voiced by one of multicultural education's most prominent theorists, James Lynch (1989, p. ix): "[M]ulticultural education has ... overemphasized differences ... and has consequently augmented social category salience or 'categorization,' when it should have been stressing those things that unite humanity, the similarities and commonalities, thereby seeking to achieve 'de-categorization.' "

11. In the previous section we could touch only superficially on a just few of the ideas for pedagogical and curricular direction found in the multicultural literature.

12. Thus the dilemma of the "social reconstructionist" multicultural educator: to educate or "reconstruct." "Should empowerment mean teaching ... students to recognize and reject sexism, thereby accepting the teacher's definition of the world, or should it mean developing their power to examine the world and act upon it themselves, which might not involve questioning sexism and could even strengthen it?" (Sleeter, 1991. p. 10.)

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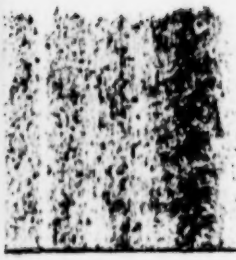

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